



INVITATION TO ATTEND



NATIONAL CONSULTATION To End All Forms of Forced Labour in the Garment Sector

A Joint Initiative of READ: Rights Education and Development, Tamil Nadu India
& the Dalit Solidarity Network UK
Supported by: All India Dalit Women's Movement (AIDMAM), New Delhi India

Where and When:

India International Centre, 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi, Wednesday 27th May 2015 10.30-4.30

The Process:

The consultation will share the current status and issues in a systematic fashion. There will be presentations by experts, real life experiences by victims, legal issues and remedies with a focus on women and discrimination. By the end of the day we will have an action plan to carry forward the recommendations

The Issues:

The consultation is expected to address some of the following:

- Implementation of Minimum Wages Act in all workplaces irrespective of nature of work
- The period of apprenticeship to be limited to six months applicable to all industries
- Abolition of all Camp labour/bonded labour/forced labour schemes
- The right to Freedom of Association is a right for all workers
- Migrant women labourers will be ensured a safe and decent working environment
- Ensure all the mandatory social security measures are available and paid

In regard to the issues above we suggest that the Ministries of Women and Child Development, Labour and Employment, Tribal Affairs, Textiles, Minority Affairs, Social Justice and Empowerment, National SC and ST Commission. National Women Commission ALL have a major role to play. However the same is also true of Business and their supply chains and international institutions such as the United Nations and ILO. Together we propose to take forward this effort to ensure a safe and decent work place and to end forced labour.

For further information and to confirm your place please contact:

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BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATION

The Context:

It is often stated that women stepping out of the home to work is empowering but the reality of textile production in Tamil Nadu is very different.

Forced labour schemes are abundant and what it means is that instead of the decent wages, comfortable accommodation and payment of a lump sum amount promised at the end of a 3 year contract, the worker is actually made to toil for a pittance and their labour rights are violated in indecent working and living conditions.

Between 80 and 90% of the workers in factories and mills are women. Most are from rural and tribal regions. 60-70% of the work force are Dalit women and girls. Wages are below a subsistence level in contravention of the Minimum Wages Act. Working conditions can be brutal, with workers working 16 hours a day 7 days a week. Increasingly, sexual exploitation and harassment is widespread.

Efforts have been made to address this but the results of those efforts are not encouraging as the issue is seen as a regional (Tamil Nadu) issue which has no impact on other parts of the country. In reality it is totally different as the labour force is drawn from all the parts of the country. There is huge migration of the labour force drawn from the eastern and central part of India to work as camp coolies – not freely chosen - which is forced labour.

Research shows that in Tamil Nadu, there is an estimated 4000 textiles mills where about 250,000 are 'employed' under the camp labour schemes. Amongst them the majority from in-state are dalits and but an inter-state migrant women work force is increasing. The average age of the workers is between 15 – 18 years (80-90% of the workforce).

Decades of experience reveals that the following core issues continue and need to be addressed at a higher level with more serious intent.

- Lack of a proper written contract for employment.
- Most women are employed as 'apprentices' and paid with a stipend instead of a wage.
- Workers do not receive the required social security measures like Provident Fund or Employees' State Insurance etc.
- There is little or no training on the job resulting in low health and safety awareness.
- Poor health and serious medical issues are commonplace
- The shift work is very long and often it is more than 12 hours in a day
- Compulsory overtime and extension of shift work with no compensation in any form.
- Very specific discrimination on gender, caste and for wages; men are paid more for equal work
- Verbal and physical abuse is a common feature of the workplace
- The women are subjected to physical abuse or sexual abuse frequently – but the majority of cases go unreported.
- The death of women labourers who are migrants are often not reported. The same is in the case of injuries.



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The approach:

As a process of addressing the issue a bottom-up approach was put in to practice. Starting from the community and district level consultations, the efforts moved on to a state level consultation.

This is now the time for a national level consultation. This ongoing exploitation of labour amounts to modern-day slavery-like conditions and requires a concrete effort to address.

There is a pressing need for an amendment or change in the existing laws and this is only possible with a strategic and systematic effort of all multi stakeholders.

The issue is gaining momentum in a much wider context. The industry is part of a supply chain linking workers to international brands who follow labour standards and norms in Europe, US and the domestic market in India

The Objective:

- To take forward the issue to a national forum to look at it in a more focused perspective as a national not a state issue
- To create a national level platform to address the issue with a multi-stakeholder approach
- To form a pressure group and plan for an action to take forward the issue with the respective authorities and institutions ensure that the necessary changes and amendments are in place to end forced labour and protect the female workforce.

About the partners:

AIDMAM: – All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch is a platform for women from the community to escalate our voices for justice. From here are born Dalit women activists who have risen to build the struggle for self-respect and dignity. We are the fierce young women, who are the force behind the assertions and the struggles. We are the spark. We are the true revolution. We believe in the words of Dr. B.R Ambedkar who said, "ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality."

DSN-UK: Dalit Solidarity Network United Kingdom campaigns for an end to caste discrimination worldwide.

It brings together organisations and individuals in the UK who are concerned with caste-based discrimination and aims to link grassroots priorities with international mechanisms and institutions to make an effective contribution to the liberation of those affected by caste discrimination.

READ: – Rights Education and Development Centre based in Tamil Nadu and working for the eradication of the bonded labour system to enable an effective work place. READ works with the community, government and textile industries with a major focus on dalits.